

Shaker Meetinghouse (Second), Building #2
(Shaker Church Family Meetinghouse)
West side of Shaker Road, 1 mi. southeast
of New Lebanon and junction of State Rt.
22 and U. S. Rt. 20
Mount Lebanon
Columbia County
New York

HABS No. NY-3254

HABS
NY,
H-NELBY,
3-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. NY-3254

MOUNT LEBANON SHAKERS CHURCH FAMILY MEETINGHOUSE,
BUILDING #2HABS
NY,
11-NELEB.V,
3-

Location: About 1.2 miles southeast of New Lebanon on rural road,
New Lebanon Vicinity, Columbia County, New York.

Present Owner Darrow School.
and Occupant:

Present Use: Library.

Brief Statement The Mount Lebanon Meetinghouse was the main
of Significance: place of worship for the most important and
influential of the Shaker communities.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Original and subsequent owners:

1824-1933	Mount Lebanon Shakers Church Family
1933	Sold to Lebanon School for Boys (later re-organized and renamed the Darrow School).
1933-1963	Darrow School.

B. Date of Erection: 1824, to replace earlier gambrel-roofed meetinghouse which was built in 1785.

C. Builder: Probably built entirely by Shaker craftsmen.

D. Original Plans, Construction, etc.: See measured drawings made as part of WPA project in 1939, and presented to the Historic American Buildings Survey by the New York State Department of Education in 1962.

The following paragraphs are from the Lassiter manuscript listed in the Bibliography:

"The Meeting House. . .was. . .designed to accomodate the large number of members then in the Shaker village, and visitors. The main meeting room measured eighty by seventy-nine feet[sic] and was without supporting pillars or other obstruction that might interfere with the religious marchers or dancers. The segmented [segmental] ceiling, which is twenty-five feet above the floor, is curved to conform with the barrel roof. It is supported from above by seventy-two lamenated beams. . . .

"The East Elevation (sheet #2) and West Elevation (sheet #3) show the projecting wing. On the first floor are the sisters' cloak room (west side) and the brethren's cloak room (east side). The hallway between these two cloak rooms is, or was, for the use of the Ministry to enter and use the stairway that led to their combination work shops and retiring rooms.

"Sheet #2 [referring to the WPA drawings] East Elevation. The door on the left (south end) was for the use of male visitors and the door on the right (north end) was for the female visitors. The end door, shown on the north Elevation, was for those drivers of horse drawn vehicles who came to the meetings. The seating arrangement in the meeting room was near this door. . . .

"The Millenial Laws of the Shaker Society stipulated that the Meeting House, and only the Meeting House, should be painted white outside."

E. Notes on Alterations and Additions:

The following paragraphs were taken from an article in the December 1962 edition of the Architectural Forum entitled "Remodeled Shaker Hall", pp. 124-126:

"The Meeting House was completed in 1824. When the school [the Darrow School] decided to remodel it 135 years later, its remarkable structure was still sound. But more important, it enclosed a great interior space, well lighted by many tall windows which, even after remodeling, still have the original small panes of imperfect, wavy glass.

"As late as 1959, the potential of the Meeting House was being wasted. At one point used as a gymnasium, it then served as a warehouse for pieces of antique Shaker furniture which had come to the school with the original purchase. But the school, which grew rapidly after the War from its initial enrollment of 35, needed a library more urgently than a collection of antiques. Thus, when Darrow auctioned the furniture in the summer of 1961, part of the money (\$16,000 of the \$75,000 total cost) and all of the space for the new library became available.

"The problem for Darrow Alumnus ('50) James Baker, who designed the remodeling, was to add a necessary 2,000 square feet of floor space and introduce lighting and modern library equipment without destroying the original space, all within a severely limited budget.

"At first, Baker considered rimming the room with balconies. He rejected the idea quickly, however, since it would all but have ruined the effect of the tall windows. Instead, to gain the additional floor area he erected a central mezzanine, 80 feet long by 30 feet wide, with an open well 20 feet square. The mezzanine, which contains study carrels and brightly colored lounge chairs for relaxed reading, fills the room lengthwise but is held well back from the lofty curved ceiling. The mezzanine thus becomes simply a floating platform, surrounded by the space of the great room. This platform is supported by two rows of new steel columns, 18 in all, which are carried on paired channels spanning between the old brick piers in the basement.

"Twin stairs, of the same dark wood used for the railings, reach the mezzanine from just off the central well. Under-surfaces of the mezzanine are gently arched to echo the curving ceiling above.

"On the lower level of the library is the reading room with librarian's office beyond. To either side are stacks for 26,000 volumes, and additional study carrels. Walls and ceilings are painted white except for the window trim and the coat-peg boards which are still the original blue.

"Most of the artificial lighting comes from warm incandescent downlights recessed in the ceiling. Each carrel, however, has its own fluorescent fixture and there are also specially designed lights on both ends of each stack.

"Remodeling work on the smaller wing, just off the main space, is still underway. When completed, it will serve on the first floor, as the main entrance to the library. Conference and audio-visual rooms will occupy the second floor, with a two-story librarian's apartment above."

"Facts and Figures

C. Lambert Heyniger Memorial Library, New Lebanon, N. Y.

Owner: Darrow School

Designer: James Baker. Structural engineer: Henry A Pfisterer.

General contractor: Darrow School.

Remodeling cost: \$75,000 (construction, \$53,580; furnishings and equipment, \$13,544; fees, \$7,876).

Building area: 18,000 square feet (10,000 square feet remodeled).

Cost per square foot: \$5.36 (about \$425 per pupil).

Financing: donations by alumni and friends, plus \$16,000 raised at auction of furniture."

F. Important Old Views: Print of in Harpers' New Monthly Magazine. Vol. XV (June-November 1857), No. 86. New York: Harper & Bros., 1857), p. 167. 1870 photograph of Meetinghouse reproduced in December, 1962 Architectural Forum, p. 124.

G. Sources of information:

Selected Bibliography

- Adams, Charles C. "New York State Museum's Historical Survey and Collection of the New York Shakers," New York State Museum Bulletin, No. 323 (March, 1941), 77-141.
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- Hopping, D.M.C., and Watland, Gerald R. "The Architecture of the Shakers," Antiques, Vol. 72, No. 4 (October 1957), 335-339.
- Johnson, Clifton. "The Passing of the Shakers," Old-Time New England, XXV, No. 1 (July, 1934), 3-19; and XXV, No. 2 (October 1934), 50-66.
- Lassiter, William Lawrence. "A Catalog of Shaker Photographs and Measured Drawings on the Historic Collection of the New York State Education Department, Albany, New York." An unpublished catalog of Shaker material belonging to the University of the State of New York, Division of Archives and History, Albany, New York, 1960. (Mimeographed).
- Meacham, Joseph, and Wright, Lucy. Millenial Laws. New Lebanon: August, 1821 (revised October 1845).
- Melcher, Marguerite Fellows. The Shaker Adventure. Cleveland: Western Reserve University Press, 1941.
- Nordhoff, Charles. The Communistic Societies of the United States. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1875.
- "Remodeled Shaker Hall," Architectural Forum, Vol. 117, No. 6 (December 1962), 124-127.
- "The Shakers," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, XV, No. 86 (June-November, 1857), 164-177.
- (Additional bibliographical listings may be found in Charles C. Adams' article, Edward Deming Andrews' The People Called Shakers, and Marguerite Fellows Melcher's The Shaker Adventure).

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: Because of the unique and pre-eminent place the Mount Lebanon Shaker community occupied in the Shaker world the Mount Lebanon Church Family meetinghouse had an unusual distinguishing feature - the large segmental roofs - that distinguished it from any other meetinghouse.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Number of stories: One high story in main rectangular block; three stories in south, smaller wing.
2. Over-all dimensions: 108'-2 1/2" (east and west elevations) x 65'-6".
3. Layout - shape: Large, rectangular block with smaller rectangular wing centered on southern elevation.
4. Foundations: Coursed ashlar.
5. Wall construction, finish, and color: Frame with clapboarding originally painted white to conform with rules for decoration, paint, etc., in the Shakers' Millenial Laws.
6. Porches, stoops: Three typical, Shaker, projecting segmental canopies over main entries. Stone porches with steps and wrought iron rails.
7. Chimneys: Three brick chimneys.
8. Openings:
 - a. Doors: Nine paneled wooden doors. Two double doors on west elevation for separate entrance of males and females. Three adjacent doors on south elevation into Ministry's wing. Single door without canopy on north elevation.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Main Meeting Room - Triple-hung wooden sash windows, twenty-over-twenty-over-fifteen lights and double-hung wooden sash, twelve-over-twelve lights, six-over-six lights. Ministry's wing - double-hung wooden sash windows, six-over-six lights and two projected windows with

four lights. Some of the first floor windows have single louvered shutters.

9. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Segmental roofs with sheet metal covering.
- b. Cornice: Standard, simple cornice, and return cornice.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: Main rectangular block - large open meeting room with permanent tiered seating for visitors against west wall.
Ministry's wing - central-hall plan.
2. Stairways: Simple, single run stairways with typical, plain Shaker rails and balusters.
3. Flooring: Plank, wooden flooring.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Wainscoting of vertical, beaded boarding and plastered walls and ceilings.
5. Doorways and doors: In general, nine paneled, wooden doors.
6. Trim: Simple, Shaker wooden trim.
7. Hardware: Simple, Shaker wrought iron hardware.
8. Lighting: Modern incandescent and fluorescent lighting.
9. Heating: Heating originally was by small iron Shaker-made stoves.

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. Orientation: The long axis of building approximately on north-south axis. The meetinghouse was the center of a complex that in general faced or sided on a north-south dirt road.
2. Walks: Flagstone walks to main entries.

Prepared by John C. Poppeliers, Architectural Historian
National Park Service
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